Ernest Smith





Rank: - Private

Number: -202276

Regiment: - Royal Scots Fusiliers 6/7th Battalion

Killed in Action at the Battle of Pilckem Ridge: - 01/08/1917 Age: 23 years

Memorial: - Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial, West-Vlaanderen, Belgium Panel 19 and 33.

Family Details

Ernest Smith was born in Ossett on the 25th January 1895 and baptised on the 3rd March 1896 at the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel, Ossett. Ernest was the only son of Ossett shoemaker Percy Smith and his wife, Margaret Alice (nee Harrison), of Altofts who married at Woodkirk on 3rd September 1892. The couple had two children, Ernest and a younger sister, Edith born 1897.

In 1895, Percy and Margaret Alice Smith were living on Bank Street, Ossett, but by 1901 the family had moved to Littlefield Road, Ossett. By 1911 they had moved again, this time to 12, King Street, Ossett, where Ernest, now aged 16, had begun work as a piecener for a cloth manufacturer.

Before enlisting he worked for Messrs. G. Harrop and Sons' Albion Mills, Horbury Bridge.

Ernest Smith married Birstall girl, Annie Bailey in the Spring of 1917.

Service Details

Ernest Smith's army service record has not survived but it is known that he was living in Batley when, in October 1916, he enlisted at Dewsbury and joined the Royal Scots Fusiliers. He embarked in June 1917 and died on the 1st August 1917.

Private Ernest Smith was posthumously awarded the British and Victory medals, but did not qualify for the 1914/15 Star, indicating that he had not served overseas before the 31st December 1915.

The 6th (Service) Battalion of the Royal Scots Fusiliers was formed at Ayr in August 1914 as part of K1 and came under orders of 27th Brigade, 9th (Scottish) Division. They moved to Bordon and again in February 1915 to Bramshott. On the 11th May 1915, the battalion landed at Boulogne and on the 7th May 1916, they transferred to 45th Brigade, 15th (Scottish) Division and amalgamated with 7th (Service) Battalion to become 6/7th Battalion.

On the 21st February 1918, the battalion transferred to the 59th (2nd North Midland) Division as a Pioneer Battalion and on the 10th May 1918, the 6th/7th Battalion was reduced to cadre strength. On the 18the June 1918, they transferred to 47th Brigade, 16th Division and returned to England, moving to

Deal in Kent. On the 2nd July 1918, the battalion was absorbed by 18th Scottish Rifles.

Ernest Smith died at the Battle of Pilckem Ridge, which took place between the 31st July and the 2nd August 1917. The 15th (Scottish) Division being in the thick of the action on the 31st July 1917:

"To the immediate right of XVIII Corps, the XIX (Watts) was accomplishing the greatest initial advance of the day. On this section of the front, the troops had to press forward over three low ridges (Pilckem, St. Julien and London), capture three German defensive lines, and push just beyond them. By early afternoon almost all of this had been accomplished.

The leading brigades of 55 and 15 Divisions had taken Pilckem Ridge and were on the St. Julien Spur, and the reserve brigades were about to attack through the London Ridge. This advance had not been without cost. The divisions had encountered a group of untouched blockhouses near the German second and third lines, which had been subdued only with heavy casualties.

As on other fronts, the creeping barrage had thinned as the troops progressed. Nevertheless, the reserve brigades, which to some extent had to fight their way past some blockhouses that were still holding out, advanced to London Ridge on schedule.

Yet the ground gained was proving insecure. For one thing, in front of 55 Division, enemy troops were massing for a counter-attack. More ominously, on the right of 15 Division, machine-gun fire was being employed against British forces from the rear." [1]

The *"Ossett Observer"* [2] had this note about Ernest Smith being missing in action:

"Unknown Fate Of An Ossett Soldier - Enquiries relative to Private Ernest Smith (22), of the Royal Scots Fusiliers, the only son of Mr. Percy Smith, shoe maker, of Lionel-street, off Station-road, and Bank-street, Ossett, from whom nothing has been heard since July 28th, have elicited an official notification from the Army Records Office to the effect that the soldier is missing from his regiment. Private Smith joined the military forces in October last year, and went to the Western front early in June last. In civilian life he worked in the spinning department of Messrs. G. Harrop and Sons' Albion Mills, Horbury Bridge. Before going out to France he married a Birstall young woman. In the last letter received from him, Private Smith said that he expected being moved 'up the line' and letters since

addressed to him have been returned to the senders marked 'wounded, not re-joined unit' or 'hospital', etc."

He is remembered with Honour at St Saviour's Church, Brownhill; Ossett and Batley War Memorials

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